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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by National Women’s Council of Catalonia – Consell Nacional de Dones de Catalunya, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The situation of women in Catalonia in terms of social protection systems, access to public services, sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has historically been closely linked with the administrative structure of Catalonia, as the guarantor of public welfare. This protective structure is associated with the successful development of a solid legal framework and public policies backed by guarantees, which has ensured general protection and public services over many years.

This structure, which underpins social protection systems and the sustainability infrastructure, has been severely affected by the economic crisis that we have suffered and by the cuts made by various governments. This, among other factors, has shown clearly that part of the system requires a different approach and that one of its shortcomings is undoubtedly the weakness of the system of equality.

The systems are currently being overhauled, which could give rise to time lags and risks relating to political and economic processes. The achievement of the sustainability agenda of Catalonia is obviously linked to the global agenda, which should bring to light the main challenges in Catalonia relating to protection systems and sustainability. In this regard, one of the main challenges is the final approval of the national plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Catalonia, based on the report of the advisory council for sustainable development "The 2030 Agenda: transform Catalonia, improve the world, where equality is a cross-cutting theme". It should be noted that Catalonia has Act No. 17/2015 of 21 July on effective equality between men and women, for which there has been inadequate implementation to confront the main challenges faced by women.

The situation in Catalonia

In 2017, the Catalan Government set up a gender equality observatory, an advisory body attached to the Catalan Institute of Women, as one of the measures to ensure compliance with the Act and to achieve effective equality between women and men. Through data produced or collected by the gender equality observatory, we should be able to find a framework to discuss social protection:

The employment rate of women is 48.7 per cent, 10 points less than that of men. In Catalonia, 44.2 per cent of registered unemployed persons are men and 55.8 per cent are women. The annual gross salary that most clearly displays the disparity between women and men corresponds to the over-55 age group, with a difference of €10,417 per annum. The lower the age, the lower the wage gap between women and men, although it remains very significant. There is notable vulnerability among young women, who have an average annual gross salary of €9,657.

With regard to access to education, women are in the majority at all levels of university education, representing 56.6 per cent of students. The difference with men is even greater in terms of marks, at 14.8 percentage points.

Women with registered disabilities represent 7.3 per cent of the population, a very similar proportion to men across almost the whole territory, but are subject to considerable discrimination in receiving adequate services and benefits.

The limited impact of article 56 of Act No. 17/2015 is highly significant; it calls for systematic inclusion of a gender variable in all statistics, surveys and data collection, which is crucial to the establishment of corrective measures or active policies. One example is the 2016 report on the state of social services in Catalonia, which does not contain gender-disaggregated data. This obviously complicates the achievement of a comprehensive perspective on access to basic social services.

At the same time, the report “Indicadors socials a Catalunya” (INSOCAT), a compilation of social indicators in Catalonia in relation to the national and European context issued by Entitats Catalanes d'Acció Social (ECAS), a federation of Catalanian social assistance organizations, in July 2018, shows that the level of poverty among unemployed persons increased in the period 2013–2017 because the amount of unemployment benefits and allowances decreased and/or because there are more unemployed persons who do not have access to social or unemployment benefits; four out of 10 unemployed persons do not receive any benefits. Naturally this affects families, especially women. It should be noted that in 2017, 87 per cent of contracts registered in Catalonia were temporary: 87.3 per cent in the case of women and 86.9 per cent, in that of men.

Older women have low pensions and face situations of dependency and loneliness – 77 per cent of older persons living alone are women – due to the failure of a social protection system based on contributions from paid work. They reach the final stage of life depending on the income of others, and if they are widowed, they are part of the most vulnerable segment of our society. According to the National Institute for Social Security, in 2016, for example, 471,645 men and 372,050 women received pensions in Catalonia.

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Proposals

Based on the above, and the determination to progress towards genuine and effective equality, the National Women's Council of Catalonia urges governments to:

- ensure that the gender equality observatory, as a body of the Catalan Institute of Women and the National Women's Council of Catalonia, is able to monitor indicators linked to the provision of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure so that equality plans can enhance the sustainable advancement of women in Catalonia;
- ensure that the Catalan Institute of Women and the National Women's Council of Catalonia develop action-oriented recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Act No. 17/2015 and to support the fulfilment of global commitments with a gender perspective, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- abandon the corrective policies offered by the current framework for public services and sustainable equality infrastructure;
- create egalitarian spaces for dialogue and policies for all women, with particular attention to cases of double or, in many cases triple discrimination, such as disability, ethnicity, administrative status, age, single parenthood, health status, etc.
- mainstream a gender perspective into the statistical data that takes into account the different socioeconomic realities of women and men.